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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed to help teachers prepare students to see the Sogolon Marionettes performing one of two stories from the West African country of Mali. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains four activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) About the Performance (offering a performance overview of the stories, and some helpful vocabulary about the stories or puppetry); (2) Getting Ready To See Sogolon Marionettes (locating the country of Mali, discussing the ancient tradition of puppetry in West Africa, exploring the telling of stories without words, discussing the puppets themselves, becoming a marionette oneself, introducing the master puppeteer, and things to watch for during the performance); and (3) Going to the Kennedy Center (helping students understand the important role of the audience in a live performance, and discussing visiting the Kennedy Center). Resources for further exploration are listed. (SR)

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Sogolon Marionettes. Cue Sheet for Teachers.

by Rosalind M. Flynn

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Sogolon Marionettes

About the Performance

Read the following performance overview to students. Follow-up information and activities are provided on pages 2–4.

"At the Kennedy Center you will attend a puppet performance by the Sogolon (pronounced SO-guh-lone) Marionettes. The five puppeteers are from the West African country, Mali (MAH-lee).

"You will see the Sogolon Marionettes perform one of two stories:

The Baptism of the Lion Cub

"The mother lion invites all the animals to celebrate the birth of her child. At the celebration, she holds a dance contest and the ostrich wins. The greedy hyena claims to be the ostrich's father so that he can take the prize – a bag full of money. The ostrich protests, and during a scuffle, she has a terrible accident. She steps on the lion cub, killing him. The animals fear the lion's anger. The hyena, who admits he is not the ostrich's father, disappears. The ostrich begs for and receives the lion's forgiveness. The story ends with the lion cub's funeral."

The Hunter and the Lion

"A beautiful woman asks her husband to kill a lion so he can demonstrate his bravery and become village chief. Although her husband knows nothing about hunting, he agrees to do as she asks. The woman dreams about being the wife of the chief. Then, realizing that the lion may kill her husband, the frightened woman runs away. All ends well: her husband kills the lion, she returns, and he becomes village chief."

Vocabulary:

marionettes – puppets moved by strings attached to their heads, arms, legs, and other body parts. The strings are attached to rods above the puppet.

puppeteers – the people who move (operate) puppets

baptism – a religious ceremony that welcomes a child into a community

hyena – a wild, wolf-like animal which feeds on other animals at night

scuffle – a fight, a struggle

funeral – a ceremony performed to mark someone's death

Cue sheet FOR TEACHERS

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. This *Cuesheet* is designed to help teachers prepare students to see *Sogolon Marionettes*.

This *Cuesheet* introduces various aspects of theater as well as pertinent vocabulary.

For Your Information (FYI) comments provide background information for teachers.

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Getting Ready to See So

Resources

You may want to go online for information about puppets and puppetry...

www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/index.html

www.poacpuppetrystore.com

You and your students may want to read...

Arnold, Mary Jo. *Playing with Time: Art and Performance in Central Mali*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995.

O'Toole, Thomas. *Mali in Pictures*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1990.

You and your students may want to watch this video recording...

Kids Make Puppets Edna Marionettes. Sherman Oaks, CA: Jim Gamble Puppet Productions, 1947. 33 minutes.

The Kennedy Center

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Cuesheet / Sogolon Marionettes

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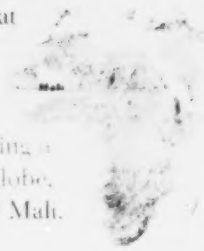
Geography

Where is Mali?

Remind students that the Sogolon puppeteers live in Mali, a West African country. Using a classroom map or globe, help students locate Mali.

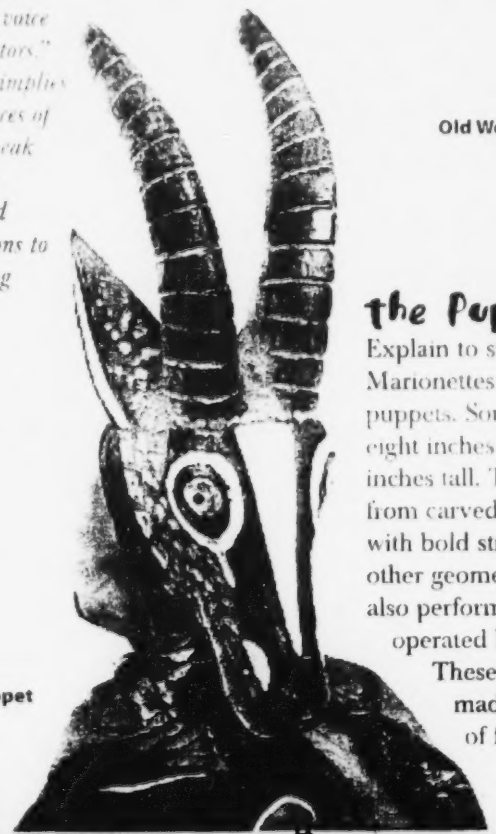


World Cultures

Puppetry in Mali

Explain to students that puppetry is an ancient tradition in West Africa. For hundreds of years, puppet performances have been a part of many African villages' ceremonies and entertainment. Today, puppets are used to teach children in Mali about their country's history and culture.

FYI *"Sogolon" means "the voice of the ancestors." This name implies that the voices of ancestors speak through the puppets and deliver lessons to people living today.*



Gazelle puppet

Non-verbal Communication

Telling Stories Without Words

Explain to students that the story they will see is told primarily through the puppet movements and the sounds of drumming. Ask students to imagine how drumming might communicate different feelings. What kind of drumming might be used to communicate happiness? fear? anger? excitement? Invite students to listen to the way drumming is used during the performance.

FYI *During the performance, students may hear some words spoken in French or Bambara* (Bahm-BAH-ruh), *languages spoken by some people in Mali.*

Old Woman puppet

The Puppets

Explain to students that Sogolon Marionettes use many different sized puppets. Some marionettes are only eight inches tall. Others are up to 20 inches tall. The marionettes are made from carved wood brightly painted with bold stripes, circles, zigzags, and other geometric patterns. Sogolon also performs with life-sized puppets operated by people inside them. These large puppets have heads made of wood and bodies made of fabric.

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golon Marionettes

Drama

Become a Marionette

Invite students to imagine they are marionettes with strings attached to their heads, wrists, elbows, and knees, and you are the puppeteer. Standing with their head and arms hanging limply, ask students to follow your directions: "I am slowly raising the string attached to your head. Your head is being pulled higher and higher. Now I am raising the string attached to your right elbow. Next, I am pulling the string attached to your left wrist – higher and higher. Then I slowly release both strings so that your arms return to your sides." Continue with other such directions.

Yaya Coulibaly, Puppeteer

Explain to students that Yaya Coulibaly (koo-lih BAH lee) has been working with puppets since he was 10 years old. Not only does Coulibaly operate puppets, he designs and makes them. He writes many of the puppet plays for his Sogolon Marionettes and is also a musician. Coulibaly loves puppet performances because they bring – sculpture, music, dance, drama, painting, and writing – together in one event.

FYI *Yaya Coulibaly began his puppet troupe in 1980. He has performed with his puppets at international festivals in Africa and Europe. In 1999, his company performed in the United States for the first time.*

Observation

Watching the Sogolon Marionettes

Invite students to watch for...

- the puppet movements. How do the puppeteers make the puppet movements communicate feelings? help tell the story?
- the different kinds of puppets. Which are marionettes? Which are large puppets with puppeteers inside?
- the puppeteers at work.

Invite students to listen for...

- the sounds of drumming. How does the drumming change to help tell different parts of the story?

After the Performance

- Discuss students observations related to the above questions.

One of Sogolon's marionettes

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Going to the Kennedy Center

A Good Audience

Help students understand their important role when attending a live puppetry performance. Read aloud and discuss the following with students:

"In a theater, you are the audience. Being an audience member in a theater is different from watching movies and television. In a theater, the puppeteers are in the same room with you. By paying careful attention, you can help the puppeteers do their best. To be a good audience member, you need to watch and listen carefully. During the Sogolon Marionettes performance, watch how the puppeteers skillfully move the marionettes to tell the story without using words. If you enjoy the performance, clap when it ends."

Visiting the Kennedy Center

Reproduce the illustrations at the bottom of this page, making sure to cover the written information for teachers so that it is not copied. Distribute the illustrations to each student. Ask students to point to the appropriate illustration as you read the following explanation aloud:

"You are going to ride a bus to The Kennedy Center. The Kennedy Center is named after John F. Kennedy, a popular president of the United States. There are six theaters in the Kennedy Center.

"When you arrive, you will walk into the Hall of States. Remember to look up to see the flags from all the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories.

"To get to the performance, you will ride in an elevator to the Kennedy Center's top floor. A large sign that says 'Theater Lab' hangs on the wall outside the theater you will enter. Inside the theater, a person wearing a red jacket – the usher – will show our class where to sit. When you watch the Sogolon Marionettes, you will sit on long, cloth covered benches arranged in rows that go upwards like big steps.

"Four hundred people can watch a performance together in the Theater Lab!"

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